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ABSTRACT

A study investigated whether grade-level status affects learning through cross-age activities. Data were collected through unstructured and open-ended audiotaped interviews with 11 pairs of students in a combined third- and fifth-grade class. Coding and analysis of data revealed seven themes related to students' perceptions of their interactions as they worked in cross-age pairs. Three themes were elaborated upon: (1) "We both know different things"; (2) "Because they help us a lot"; and (3) "We work together." Interactions between these themes were investigated to see how and why status differences influence small group work. Status was defined by grade level/age, and therefore, knowledge. Results showed that fifth graders perceived the third graders as incapable and therefore did things for the third graders as opposed to trying to help them learn to do them on their own. Results suggest that the effects of differences in knowledge status in small groups can lead to interactions that do not foster learning on the part of either the high- or the low-status partner. Suggested ways to deal with this "Lady Bountiful syndrome" in classrooms include assigning lower status students to leadership positions and "preteaching" key elements to lower status students. (BAC)

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Grade-Level Status Effects in Multiage Groupwork: The Lady Bountiful Syndrome

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Camilla: That is I. Camilla the Heedless – Camilla the Spendthrift – Camilla the Willfully-wealthy! And that's just it, Aunt Anne – I'm rich. And while I'm rich the dear pauper whose blood I carry in my veins must morally break his pile of stones, and pick his little heap of oakum, in the shelter of my home. The improvident rich must nourish the improvident poor.

Miss Brent: [Earnestly.] Yes, Camilla, but what of the improvident poor's able bodied son?

. . .

Camilla: Aunty, I – I have believed in Dennis. I have watched for a sign of an honest, worthy ambition and there has been nothing but indolence and indifference. I have hoped to see him go into the world and do good because he felt himself a man, and not because he found himself a beggar. And now I see my mistake, and I – I am disappointed.

(excerpt from *Lady Bountiful: A Story of Years*; a play by Arthur W. Pinero, 1892)

The image of Lady Bountiful has typically represented the philanthropic or charitable efforts of high status women. In this paper we have appropriated her image to describe students in high status positions and their perceptions of the help they give to those in low status positions. When we think of Lady Bountiful, we see her as walking around saying something to the effect of, "Here, let me help *you people* because, clearly, you could not get by without my help." The following is an account of how we found her in a classroom....

In many schools today, instruction in small groups is becoming more and more predominant as the buzzword "cooperative learning" proliferates throughout education. To many people, these terms are synonymous. However, small group instruction is an umbrella that encompasses a variety of formats, including cooperative groups and peer tutoring (Stodolsky, 1984). We thought that we knew a great deal about small group instruction, at least within the tradition of cooperative groups (see Slavin, 1991). What we did know was a lot about the original purposes for small group learning in aiding desegregation, how to set up and manage small groups in a classroom setting, and how to deal with accountability issues in small groups. What we had not considered was how the issue of social status affected what really went on in these small groups. It took twenty-two third and fifth graders and their teachers to help us understand how crucial this issue is in any small group situation.

When we started our investigation, we were particularly interested in one key feature of small group instruction — that it provides an opportunity for students to interact with one

another more directly than in whole class instruction. The reason we were interested in this aspect is because we subscribe to a theoretical framework that a student's learning and development can be fostered through interaction with "more capable" peers (Vygotsky, 1978). That more capable peer could be either the teacher or another student. According to this theory, the more capable peer leads the younger student into what is called a "zone of proximal development" which originates where the younger student can perform a task without help (actual level of development) and leaves off where the younger student requires a great deal of help to complete a task (potential level of development). The more capable peer is supposed to provide help that allows the younger student to try to perform more and more of the task on his or her own, taking more and more of the help away as the younger student no longer needs it. This is the way learning works, theoretically. We were interested in whether or not learning worked this way for a classroom of third and fifth graders who had been working in cross-age pairs or teams for a number of different projects over the course of a school year.

Thus, we entered this investigation thinking we would be using a micro-lens, trying to understand a phenomena at the semiotic level. However, as became quickly evident to us, the students' reactions to working with partners in the other-grade classroom told a much more interesting story than the actual interactions. We discovered this tale as we collected interview data on the students' impressions of cross-age activities, and the theory we have derived from our data is from a more macroscopic perspective and thus is indirectly related to the framework with which we began. Nevertheless, given that there are few empirical studies on students' perceptions of cross-age learning activities, we would like to address the implications of our theory for social constructivist models of learning after discussing our data and theory.

Research Context and Methodology

The context in which we conducted our study involves cross-age groupwork in the combined classrooms of a third and fifth grade. These were two complete classes, each having its own teacher, but in a room with a folding wall between them. For most of the year, the teachers kept this wall open so that the two classes could interact and work together. In addition to a number of cross-age academic activities in science, math, reading, and art, the two classes worked together on common social and management goals set up by the teachers. The school itself is located in a suburban university town. The neighborhood that the school services is one of the least affluent neighborhoods in this town, and there is a high degree of transience in the student population as many of their families move from one apartment complex to another, often crossing into the territory served by a different school. In contrast, the school also serves areas with more affluent families, giving the population a more stable presence. The challenge that this diversity within the school population presents was one factor that led the school staff to join with our university in a partnership to improve the quality of education at the school. It is through this partnership that we obtained entry into these classrooms — the two teachers involved desired to "restructure" their classes in a way that would both allow them some creativity and flexibility in their teaching as well as letting them play upon the strengths of one another as professionals. Our efforts here stem from work in support of these teachers' goals.

Although we had originally intended to interview cross-age pairs of students who had worked together, the content of early interviews encouraged us to adopt a theoretical sampling method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in which we interviewed both same-gender as well as mixed-gender pairs of the same grade. As a result of this, all but one of our interviews consists of same-grade student pairs. We believe that the overall set of respondents reflect the ethnic and racial make-up of the classes. We conducted a total of 11 interviews, involving approximately half (N=22) of the students in the two classes. Our interviews tended towards being unstructured and open-ended, with emphases on what experiences the students had doing the cross-age work and

how they felt about such tasks. We took notes as well as audio taped our interviews and transcribed the audio tapes at a later date.

Next, we coded and analyzed the interviews using the constant comparative method described by Glaser & Strauss (1967) in their discussion of grounded theory. We began by coding transcripts by using *in vivo* coding (Chesler, 1987). This technique involves scanning the text of the transcript for statements made by the participants. These statements are marked or underlined in the text, and removed from the text as well, becoming our "codes." We gleaned 366 code statements from our transcripts of the student interviews. We were careful to note where each statement came from in order to later facilitate further analysis.

For our next level of analysis, we compared these code statements from all of the different interviews with each other. We then began to organize the code statements into clusters by comparing each code statement to others in each cluster. We created 60 category clusters, each containing anywhere from one to seventeen code statements, averaging around six per cluster, and each given a "label" indicating what the code cluster represented or meant. Finally, we generated a second level of categories by comparing each of the 60 category clusters with one another (Figures 1-7). This new set of seven "meta" categories provided a greater level of abstraction and generality (Figure 8). Throughout this process of successive abstraction, we conferred with each other regarding the categorization, questioning and clarifying the placement of each code statement and category cluster.

Overall, we generated seven metacategories or themes in the data (see Table 1). Though they are all interrelated and equally deserving of theoretical articulation, we chose to elaborate on three metacategories related to the students' perceptions of their interactions as they worked in multi-age groups or pairs: "We both know different things," "Because they help us a lot," and "We work together." One reason for this choice is that "We both know different things" was a theme that had several readily definable dimensions within the data and, to us, presented an issue around group work that is not often discussed in our own field — the effects of status on multi-age interactions. Furthermore, the three metacategories stated above are strongly related along

these dimensions that illustrate the effects of status, and so we felt it was necessary to investigate the interactions between these themes in order to see how and why status differences influence small group work.

From Whence Lady Bountiful?

There are many factors that may contribute to the raising or lowering of a student's status in the eyes of her or his peers. What becomes critical in the interaction between our third and fifth grade students is, for the most part, what makes their groups distinct: the effects of two additional years of schooling. Indeed, some students see the difference in age and the difference in knowledge as identical — you are smarter because you are older. What follows immediately below are explications of the metacategories or themes we believe are responsible for Lady Bountiful in the classroom, with support from the words of the students.

"We both know different things."

The students we interviewed spoke at length about what it means to "know" or what it means to be "smart;" both indications of what intelligence may be to them. In the broadest terms, intelligence is exhibited in terms of quantity of knowledge and rate of performance. These correspond to rather typical features of intelligence as found in other studies (Schommer, 1990; Sternberg, 1985).

In examining the quantity of knowledge issue, we find several interesting features. It is quite evident that both third and fifth grade students have a good idea of what they know and how much they know. They are also quite aware of how knowledgeable others are:

- We (third graders) each pretty much have close to the same ideas, because we're in the same grade and stuff. We have similar ideas. (G3.04.03)*
- I like having a fifth grader to help me because all the third graders know the same thing that I know, but the fifth graders know things that are different. (G3.11.05)

* references for material quoted from interviews are given in the following format:
(gender/grade . interview # . page #)
G=girl, B=boy, I=interviewer, 3=third grade, 5=fifth grade

- (Our teacher) asks questions on a test on things you should know. Fourth graders would probably ask the same things. (B5.09.05)

This does go beyond awareness to judgment. The third graders see this differential as a boon; it provides opportunities for learning greater than those they would have working with their classmates. They also value what they know; they do not see this interaction with fifth graders as a one-way street:

- (The fifth-grade girls are good partners because) they know lots of stuff and I like to learn stuff. (B3.14.11)
- Maybe it's pretty funny, because they're probably thinking, "this little kid's trying to teach me something I don't know." (G3.11.07)

On the other hand, the fifth graders seem to view of the abilities of their younger partners as somewhat limited. The older students see the younger ones as incompetent and incapable of doing anything on their own:

- I knew more, but what do you expect? (G5.15.05)
- Third graders don't know how to read good, so I just read to them (B5.08.02)

Furthermore, this message is communicated quite clearly to the third graders. They understand how the fifth graders feel about them, and this irritates them. In contrast, the younger students realize that, occasionally, they *do* have some special knowledge or skill that their fifth grade partners do not have, though this was never acknowledged or recognized by the older students:

- Fifth graders think I'm not good enough, they think I'm dumb. (B3.14.06)
- I can help fifth graders if they can't draw that well and they have to draw a picture on some kind of work, work page. (B3.13.11)
- Are there times when you know more than they (5th graders) do? (I.12.04) Yeah, we're working on something that they'll do later in the year. (G3.12.04)

As these quotes illustrate, sometimes this "third grade edge" is due to some ability of the child, and at other times there were instances of preteaching a concept by the third grade teacher to give that edge to her students, a strategy that the teacher mentioned, in interviews, she used quite deliberately for this purpose.

How do our students describe the differences between what third and fifth graders know? The difference is almost entirely expressed in terms of quantity. They see knowledge as incremental and grade-appropriate; in other words, there are certain things you learn in third grade, other things you learn in fourth, and still others that you learn in fifth grade:

- Just working with the fifth graders is different than working third graders. Because the fifth graders know more than us and they did times already and all this stuff in the fourth grade. (G3.12.03-04)
- It'd be easier to teach fourth graders than third graders since they'd kinda know more and need less help. (G5.09.04)
- It'd be easier to teach a fourth grader division since they'd just be learning it and I'm getting used to double division now. And I could see a sixth grader trying to teach me double division. (B5.09.05)

This view of knowledge can be used at times as a yardstick:

- She's smart like a third grader. (B5.08.07)
- They're (two third graders) different. They're really smart and they could be in fourth grade if they wanted to. (G5.15.08)

As is illustrated below, the incremental nature of knowledge becomes quite important for helping behaviors. Since you can have more knowledge than someone else, this view fosters the notion that knowledge can be given away from one student to another.

Rate of performance, or how "fast" you are, also seems to be something that is grade-related, though students recognize that differences exist within their own grades. The smartest people are, in general, recognized as the fastest people as well:

- Some girls are smart and zip through it right away. (B3.14.09)
- It's kinda easier with a third grader and it's kinda hard with a fifth grader. 'Cause the fifth graders know more stuff and they probably would do it faster. The third grader would probably do it kinda slow as you would. (B3.13.07)
- (Fifth graders) read faster and it doesn't take all that time to explain it to them. (G5.15.09)

Fifth graders often mention, in terms of their partner preferences, someone who works quickly as desirable. A few third graders, however, realize that speed is not the most important issue in performance — these students describe "smart" students as those who are careful and willing to check their answers.

One last issue on knowledge that has important implications for helping behaviors is that of truth standards:

- We just agreed, like if we turned our computers and if both is right then we just put the answer down. (G3.12.06)
- (It's correct) if both people get the same number, otherwise we just do it over. (G5.10.01)

Consensus is truth; if there is no consensus, it's best to do the problem over again. While this appears to be an egalitarian way of resolving discrepancies, in probing of some fifth graders we found that the point of doing a problem again was to show third graders that their answers are wrong and that the fifth graders' answers are correct.

In sum, our students see "smartness" in terms of knowledge and speed. Knowledge itself is quantitative, incremental, and age- or grade-related. Because of its quantitative nature, it can be given to those who have less of it. This is part of helping, which is discussed below.

"Because they help us a lot."

While definitions for what "help" is may vary, the meaning of this word remained fairly consistent for our students:

- I think it's the same (helping third and fifth graders) because it's really simple when you know something, like it's simple when a third grader needs you because you already know and it's simple when a fifth grader needs you because you already know. (G3.11.06)
- I see how much they know and tell them the rest and see if they understand. If not, I'll just tell them again. (G5.15.05)
- (To explain something), first you find out how much they don't know. If they don't get it, you say it gently. If they still don't get it, you get frustrated and you just tell them the answer. (G5.15.05)

Help is giving the helpless the answer. In order to do this, however, you have to own the necessary knowledge. The frustration expressed in the last quote was not uncommon in the fifth graders, and resurfaces in other comments these students have on helping. The notion of help as knowledge-giving also dominates the discussion below.

When is help needed?

- If you get it wrong, the fifth graders help you. (G3.12.03)
- How do your friends go about helping you? (I.13.10) Like when I forgot what the instructions of a math paper we're supposed to do, like I forgot what the instructions were. (B3.13.10)
- She would tell me when she needed help or she would skip it and I'd say "How come you didn't do that?" (G5.08.04)

Most often, both third and fifth graders recognize that help is needed when someone has the wrong answer on a task or when something has been forgotten. The fifth graders also talk about monitoring the performance of their third grade partners for correctness (remembering here that consensus is truth) and completeness, and stepping in when they believe help is needed.

Who needs help and who gives it? As one may expect from their respective beliefs on knowledge, the answer differs between third and fifth graders:

- Third graders don't help us much, we mostly help them. (G5.09.04)
- It's not different if somebody different needs help, because we're all people and we're all the same and we need to know different things. (G3.11.06)
- We helped each other. (G3.04.02)

The fifth graders see themselves as the helpers and the only way the third graders help out is by pointing out answers that may be wrong, which the fifth graders proceed to correct on their own. Many of the third graders agree, but some believe that they help the fifth graders as well, that they help *each other*. Additionally, there are numerous occasions when the third graders were unable to get anyone's help, even when actively seeking it:

- I kept asking people what to do and they wouldn't help me. (B3.14.04)
- She (a 5th grader) doesn't help people. She doesn't like to help. (G3.12.08)
- Fifth grade boys don't really help out, they're not really helpful. Maybe they're too smart or maybe they don't really work as much. (B3.14.15)

Being "too smart" strikes very close to one of the most common themes for both the third and fifth graders — that the fifth graders tend to do all the work. For the fifth graders, this is sometimes problematic and sometimes desirable:

- I say, "You don t have to read." Even though they say they have to, but they don't. (B5.08.02)
- I remember my partner for that. I did all the work. Then when we made up new problems, he came up with two and I came up with two. (B5.16.10)

While a number of fifth graders mention turn-taking while they are working with the third graders, they tell a different story when probed:

- (When making up new problems), I really did all the problems and he would say "just add an equals sign." (B5.16.11)

When helping behaviors break down, the third graders agree that the fifth graders do all the work. They are unanimous in seeing this as a problem, despite what the fifth graders may think:

- She (the fifth grader) pretty much did everything. I told her that she wasn't supposed to do everything, I was supposed to do it. (G3.07.08)
- We didn't even talk about anything, they just did the work. (B3.14.06)

So, while there are occasions in which the partners help each other, quite often the fifth graders do the task on their own without input from their third grade partners. This appropriation of the task can be better understood when the knowledge-giving aspects of help are considered. Since the fifth graders have the knowledge and the third graders do not, it seems to make sense that they should do the task on their own. Giving the answer to the younger student seems to be sufficient, in the eyes of the fifth graders, for the third graders to understand what was to be done. While there is some discussion by the fifth graders of being able to work faster on their own, it is the difference in amount of knowledge that predominates both their and the third graders' explanations of why the older students, on occasion, do all the work.

"We work together"

What does it mean to have a partner?

- You gotta work with somebody else. (B3.13.13)
- A partner is like when you talk with a partner or do reading or whatever. (G3.12.14)
- (A good partner) listens and pays attention and doesn't get into trouble. (G5.10.02)

Having a partner simply means working with someone else. Most likely, it involves taking turns. An alternative to taking turns is to do a task separately, either one problem at a time or all at once, and check your answers with your partner. Occasionally, working together may actually mean working on some task together, but this is often when some shared product is required:

- I did one problem and then she did another; when she needed help I helped her. (G5.08.04)
- With fifth graders we do the same papers then trade them to correct them. (B5.09.04)
- A group is like when you're working together, like when you draw or something, making like a poster. (G3.12.14)
- We work together more often when it's multiage stuff that we both know. We don't work together when it's stuff they know (B3.14.01)

If two partners are of roughly the same ability level, either turn taking or concurrent performance of the task may be effective ways of completing the task, as well as sharing responsibility for its completion. Given the disparities perceived between the third and fifth graders, however, little sharing may go on. Turn-taking between two fifth graders means something different from turn-taking with a less-knowledgeable third grader. The last statement quoted above indicates that, once again, the third graders are quite aware of the difference as well. While statements such as this one indicate that sharing the task, at some level, is required for working *together*, most statements our students made show no sign of this. In general, these students do not have the impression that working together means sharing: sharing the responsibility of getting a task done maybe, but not sharing the task or sharing ideas.

Why Does Status Matter?

To recap, knowledge and knowing is characterized by two dimensions — how much one knows and how fast one can work. While speed seems important to the fifth graders, it really plays little role in helping others. Knowledge, on the other hand, is seen as incremental and grade-level appropriate. With respect to the latter dimension, the third graders see themselves as capable and though they see themselves as not knowing *as much* as the fifth graders, they can still do a lot of things. Sometimes they talk about having special skills that the fifth graders do

not possess. On the other hand, the fifth graders see themselves as much more knowledgeable than the third graders and they see the third graders as incapable and very needy in terms of performing learning tasks. In essence, this view is similar to the one held by Lady Bountiful with regard to her cousin, Dennis: the improvident bright must enlighten the improvident dim.

These views of knowledge have an effect on how the fifth graders go about helping their third grade partners. Ostensibly, the fifth graders see themselves as having knowledge that the third graders need. It falls to the fifth graders to bequest this knowledge upon the third graders in the form of "telling them the answer" or "doing the reading for them" though their perception of this is that they "took turns with the third grader," even though the turns may not have been equal. The fifth graders believe that they have acted benevolently: they have discovered what the third graders do not know and, in their mind, they have provided the third graders with the necessary knowledge. They then become frustrated because they cannot understand why the third graders just don't learn. In turn, by having the fifth graders take over and perform a given task, the third graders often feel as though the fifth graders think they (the third graders) are stupid.

The problem is that these fifth graders do not understand that they cannot just "throw knowledge" at the third graders and expect them to understand. People cannot help themselves if someone else is always doing things for them. And this is where we found Lady Bountiful — the high status fifth graders (status as defined by grade level/age and, therefore, knowledge) coming in and doing things *for* the lower status third graders. Because the fifth graders perceive the third graders as incapable, they do things *for* the third graders as opposed to trying to help them learn to do things on their own. Thus, there is a one-way communication of information, rather than a more mutual, collaborative effort that may lead to both the third and fifth graders constructing understanding for themselves. The fifth graders are not providing the temporary help to allow the third graders to eventually attain mastery.

Perhaps the fifth graders adopt the Lady Bountiful attitude because this cross-age work is not a daily occurrence. For example, in many sibling relationships, the fact that one is faced with the brother or sister on a day-to-day basis provides the motivation to try to get the sibling to

perform tasks on his or her own. Most older children do not want to have to make peanut butter sandwiches for a younger sibling everyday. But with this cross-age work, it often occurs once a month or so, and it is just easier to get the work done by doing it oneself. Also, it makes it difficult for the students to become familiar with one another, enough so that the third graders feel more comfortable being assertive or so that the fifth graders find out how much the third graders really know.

Additionally, there was no direct feedback on these cross-age interactions, nor were there any direct consequences. The cross-age work is typically a one-time event where you are in and then out and you are not held accountable for the fact that the third grader cannot do a task on his or her own. A final aspect that may influence this interaction is the nature of the activity in which the cross-age pairs are to participate. Task structures that implicitly confirm the knowledge difference between the two partners, such as tutoring situations, may encourage the third and fifth graders to adopt these attitudes towards one another.

We would like to point a view instances of comments from students that did go against the grain of what may be described as typical belief for our students. One such instance occurred in an interview with a fifth grade boy and girl. In describing how helping someone feels, they spoke of being uncomfortable and anxious about trying to help someone when the topic was one which they did not understand. The discomfort arose from the difficulty involved in explaining something that is not completely understood. In a separate interview with two third grade boys, one of the boys commented on several occasions about the value of not knowing. What this student valued was being able to figure out for himself what he was to learn, rather than being told:

- The best thing I like about working with fifth graders is something they don't know very good and something that we don't know very good. (B3.14.05)
- Just getting the answers, that's not learning. (B3.14.13)

In both of these cases, we see students confronting the knowledge-telling issue. On one hand, we have the fifth graders realizing that there is more to help than giving something you own to

another. On the other, we have a third grader who values ignorance rather than abhorring its vacuum, seeing it as a place for a common starting point.

Support from the Literature

We found several other studies describing a similar phenomenon around status effects on the interactions in small group work. While none of these discussed Lady Bountiful, one study outlined Expectation States Theory (Cohen, 1986) which seemed to support our findings. Expectation States Theory (EST) states that as students see themselves and are seen by others as having less academic ability (in the case of our third graders, knowledge) they will be less active and influential than those who are seen to have more ability (Cohen, Lotan, & Catanzarite, 1986; Webb & Palincsar, 1993). Our third graders are often less influential, even though they feel that they have contributions to make. Try as they might, the status characteristics around academics (grade level, high/low ability, etc.) are apparently so well-ingrained by third grade that these students talk about behaving exactly as they should in such a hierarchy.

Expectation States Theory also involves social status characteristics, such as race and gender. The students we interviewed did not talk about these as having a positive or negative impact on their interactions. The students did comment on both race and gender, which we placed in a category entitled "They like different things than us because they have to be themselves." The following is an example of the comments about race.

- I don't think it (race/ethnicity of partner) matters, I just work with whoever I get. (G3.11.14)

Gender was similar, with students commenting on preferences for working with a partner of a particular gender.

- Some girls are nicer than some boys because sometimes when I work with a girl, she's kinda nicer than one of the boys. (B3.13.12)
- Like boys, they don't like us because we're girls, but I think something sorta happens when we start working. I think the work does it. (G3.11.10)

This does not mean, however, that race and gender do not effect their cross-age interactions. It may just be a lot less salient than grade level for these students.

Our theory centering on Lady Bountiful stipulates a one-way power dynamic, whereas, in our interpretation of EST, both parties hold expectations of each other which contribute to the power dynamic. The difference between the two theories lies in that, for our situation, the third grade students were always seen as low status, while the fifth grade students always considered themselves to be high status with respect to being knowledgeable. Applying EST to a typical single-grade classroom, one would expect status levels to shift for each student dependent upon the group context being examined.

Can We Banish Lady Bountiful from the Classroom (and Should We Try?)

We believe there are several implications for this status effect given the results of our study. By allowing implicit or explicit status differences to drive small group or cooperative instruction, we are placing those students who are in lower status groups (the "buzzards" reading group, girls, African-American students, etc.) at a disadvantage for gaining beneficial learning experiences from group work (Cohen, Lotan, & Catanzarite, 1986; Webb & Palincsar, 1993). In allowing Lady Bountiful into our classrooms, we implicitly condone the one-way power dynamic which leads to dealing with students who need help by "throwing knowledge" at them, regardless of whether they understand the information and what to do with it or not.

Thankfully, there are some ideas about how we might politely (or not so politely) ask Lady Bountiful to leave. Developing prosocial norms, instruction in helping behavior, structuring interaction in groups, discussing group process, and teacher scaffolding of group activities are some ways to handle status issues in groups outlined by Webb & Palincsar (1993). For example, because so much of what students experience in schools is based on either large group instruction or individualized seat work, it is first important that they understand what makes a group work effectively together. This includes rules about how individuals in the group behave as well as strategies for handling conflict. Once this base is set, students can then learn how to best help others. Some of our students started with reasonable strategies, like

- I see how much they know and tell them the rest. (G5.15.05)

- I looked at how she was calculating and she forgot to press equals and she should have. (B5.08.07)

In both of these instances, the fifth graders are finding out how much the third grader already knows or are monitoring the process of the task. However, they tend to get frustrated easily and just "tell them the rest" which is not necessarily helpful to the third graders. A grounding in a variety of helping behaviors might provide both third and fifth graders with a repertoire from which to choose.

Another way to deal with status more directly involves assigning roles within the group. By assigning a lower status student (i.e., a third grader) to a leadership role, the teacher can artificially shift some of the power dynamics in the group. Talking about roles within a group and about group process in general can help students to understand these issues more explicitly and provide them with a vocabulary with which to engage in discussion. It can also help students to recognize that it is important to listen to all members in a group. Of course, this is no easy feat for the teacher, who must try to consistently monitor and enforce the group norms developed by the students and facilitate the discussions of group process. A teacher who takes on this task must be comfortable negotiating situations with conflict.

Finally, one of the things suggested by Cohen (1986) is that the teacher "pre-teach" some key things to the lower status students. We found evidence of this in one of our conversations with the third grade teacher:

T: We try to structure things where the third graders will have as much chance to do well as the fifth graders. Um, we try to pick carefully what we're going to be doing so that they, it's not a situation where the fifth graders are really a teacher. You know. And often I, like, preteach something so they have a little experience that the fifth graders don't.

I: Actually, that's what one of the groups I was talking with in the third grade said that you had done that.

T: They knew I did it!?

I: Yeah, "The fifth graders aren't going to get this 'till January but we know about it already." I mean, they're like "Wait 'till they do it."

T: Yeah, but they need that little bit, um, to feel comfortable just within the power frame of the groups. You know, a little bit of an edge. But we do try to be very careful in what we pick to have them do, you know, like so that they each are bringing skills.

One difference between what this teacher mentions and what Cohen suggests is that it is necessary to alert the higher status students to the fact that the lower status students have important information that the group or pair will need. It may be that the differential between third and fifth graders is too large a gap to close completely. But being able to give the third graders some "edge" is a possibility.

Sending the well-intentioned Lady away may be more difficult than we think. While there are ways of directly addressing issues of status differences between students, we must also consider what we have shown here to be the root of the knowledge-status differential: the widely held believe of knowledge existing in incremental, grade-specific quantities. All of our students found this to be a powerful explanatory mechanism for a wide range of events that occurred while working with their partners. Given the age-graded nature of our system of schooling, this lockstep view of knowledge is not at all surprising, but to us it is quite disturbing.

Perhaps the most common metaphor used to describe the culture of schooling is that of the factory or workplace. Seeing knowledge as incremental and valuing speed in task performance is very much a part of this metaphor: the worker who produces the most in the least amount of time is quite obviously the best. In describing the academic workplace, Doyle (1983) uses the concepts of ambiguity and risk associated with a piece of academic work to explain how students react to the tasks they are given, and to demonstrate how they often negotiate with the teacher to reduce the levels of these two features of a task. Work of low ambiguity and low risk can be done quickly and efficiently, with little concern for how correct one's answers may be. Therefore, this sort of work is valued and, unfortunately, is quite common in our classrooms. It is not the sort of task that leads to greater understanding, as it is not conceptually challenging.

To explore the implications of the academic workplace in fostering the belief that knowledge is incremental, we will briefly describe here two of the multi-age tasks in which our students participated. The first is that of a calculator math activity. For this task, the students were placed into fifth-third grade pairs to complete a worksheet of problems. The worksheet was written with a notation system describing what keystrokes they should use on the calculator, with

the intention of exploring the functions of several keys (for example, change-sign and memory) that may be unfamiliar to the students. The duration of this activity was approximately two hours. After completing the worksheet, each pair was to devise five original problems written in the calculator notation. In general, the fifth graders had little difficulty reading the notation and performing the operations, both of which were difficult for their third grade partners. The task was also straight forward enough to not require much discussion, if a student chose to do it alone. This is quite often what we saw — the fifth graders simply doing all the work, and giving the answers to their partners or telling them what to do.

In contrast to this is an activity both classes worked upon in science. For this activity, the intent of which was to develop science process skills, the students were placed into teams of two fifth and two third grade students. Over the course of one month, the students measured a wide range of their physical features, such as height, arm span, eye color, and the width of a front tooth. They decided, as a whole group, on fifteen of the various measurements to focus upon, and compiled the results of all the small groups. From the averages of these, each small group constructed what they considered to be the average student of their two classes, and drew this person to full scale. While there was still a relatively low level of risk involved in this task, what the results would be and what direction they would head was highly ambiguous. The groups also had the opportunity to work together over a much longer time base than the calculator activity, giving them the chance to develop relationships within their small groups. In general, though some problems did arise in this activity, it was viewed far more favorably than the calculator task by the students. Additionally, the teachers saw this activity as more valuable in terms of student learning.

This science activity was not a typical workplace task. It was an ill-defined activity with no clear delineation of what the students' end products should look like. No one knew at the beginning what the "one right answer" might be, since there was none. Anomalies were encountered that forced students to examine how best to deal with their data, such as the problem of representing the "average" eye color. Finally, this activity involved the students quite directly;

they were studying themselves. In this activity, there were ample opportunities for both fifth and third graders to participate on equal footing. All members of the group were of equal value, as all of them needed to be included in the measurement. The final product contained, essentially, a sharing of what the fifth graders were like and what the third graders were like.

It is our belief that activities like the calculator worksheet foster and support beliefs about the nature of knowledge that lead to Lady Bountiful. Such views do not support the notion that knowledge and understanding are constructed by individuals personally, but rather that they can be transferred by simple knowledge-telling strategies. They also do not support students discussing how problems might be solved or what they might mean, since quick completion is implicitly encouraged. Tasks such as the scientific measurement activity, on the other hand, involve students actively building knowledge with one another, presenting opportunities for discussing the value and meaning of that knowledge. Rather than a monolithic entity one needs to acquire, knowledge is a far more fluid, uncertain, and idiosyncratic quantity. Therefore, it cannot be given or transferred between students; rather, it must be constructed by individuals and, on occasion, this process of construction needs to be supported, not supplanted.

In conclusion, we feel that the effects of knowledge-status differences in small groups can lead to interactions that do not foster learning on the part of either the high or the low status partner. Cohen's Expected States Theory gives us some suggestions as to how we might address status differences directly; knowledge or academic status as well as other status issues such as race, ethnicity, or gender. However, much more needs to be done to determine what approaches are most effective. Directly addressing status differences may be akin to treating the symptoms and not the disease. We feel that the structure of schooling and its effects on classroom culture contributes significantly to the development and fostering of the beliefs children hold that make these status differences problematic. It remains to be seen exactly how changing classroom culture from a workplace model to one that supports more equitable collaboration between students might influence the development of student knowledge beliefs towards a more personal, constructive view.

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Table 1: Metacategories

Name	*# of categories*	*# of statements*
Are we going to do something about feelings?	6	41
They like different things than us because they have to be themselves	9	54
Why can't we pick our partners?	9	59
We both know different things	14	76
Because they help us a lot	12	91
We work together	5	26
I had a lot of fun	5	19
Totals	*60*	*366*

Figure 1
Metacategory A: Are we going to do something about feelings?

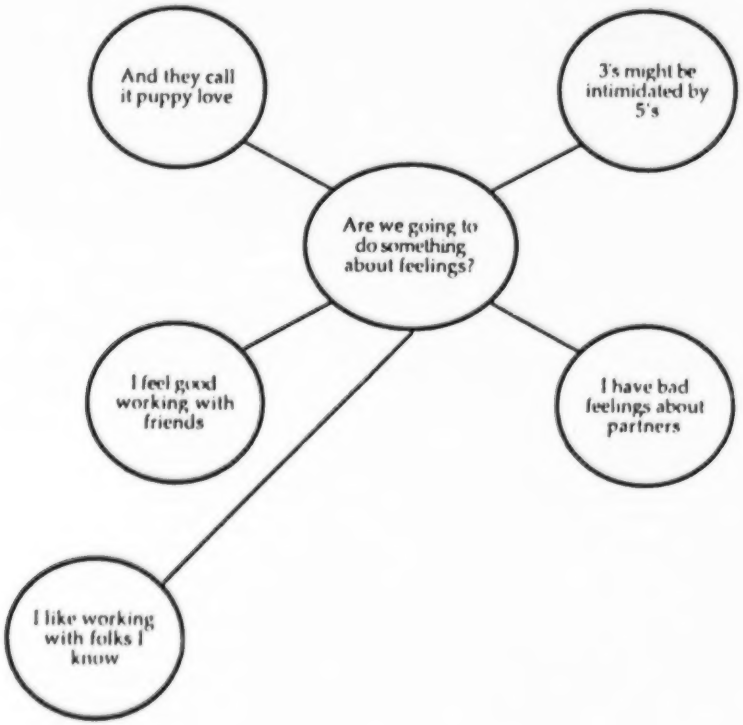
And they call it puppy love
3's might be intimidated by 5's
Are we going to do something about feelings?
I feel good working with friends
I have bad feelings about partners
I like working with folks I know

Figure 2
Metacategory B: They like different things than us because they have to be themselves

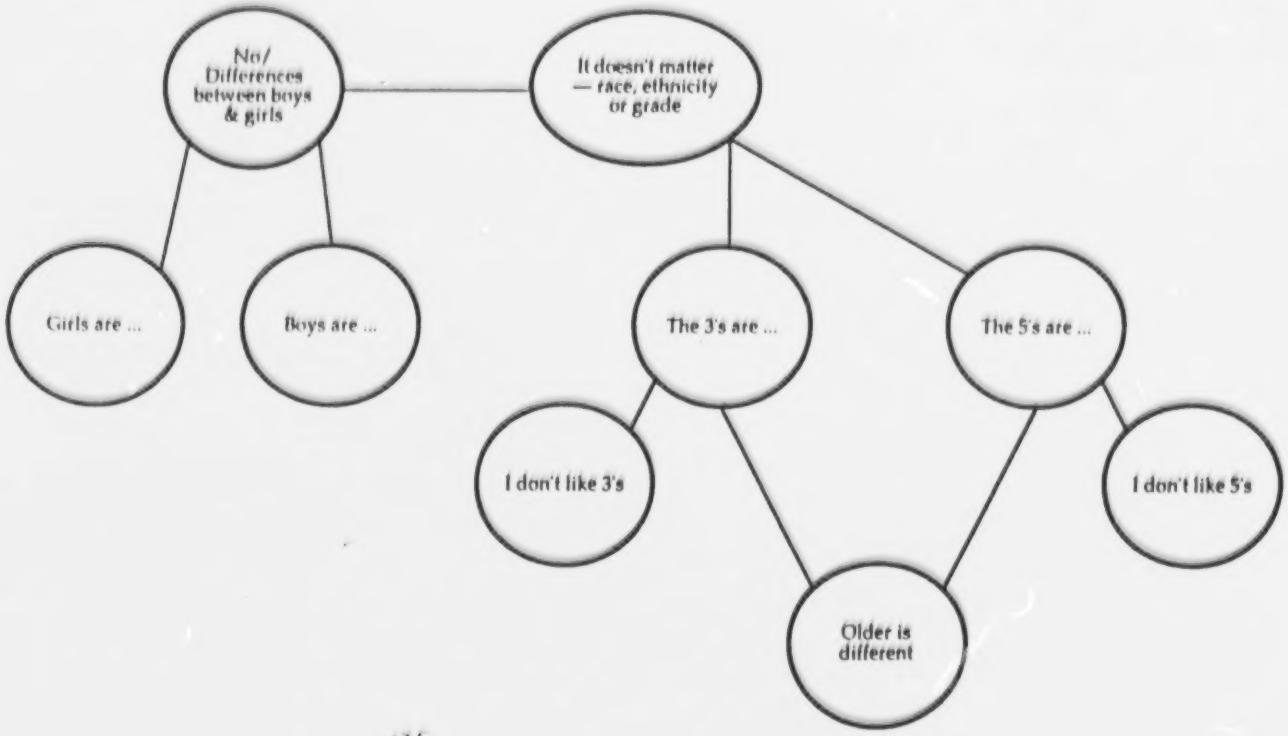
No/ Differences between boys & girls
It doesn't matter — race, ethnicity or grade
Girls are ...
Boys are ...
The 3's are ...
The 5's are ...
I don't like 3's
I don't like 5's
Older is different

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Figure 3
Metacategory C: Why can't we pick our partners?

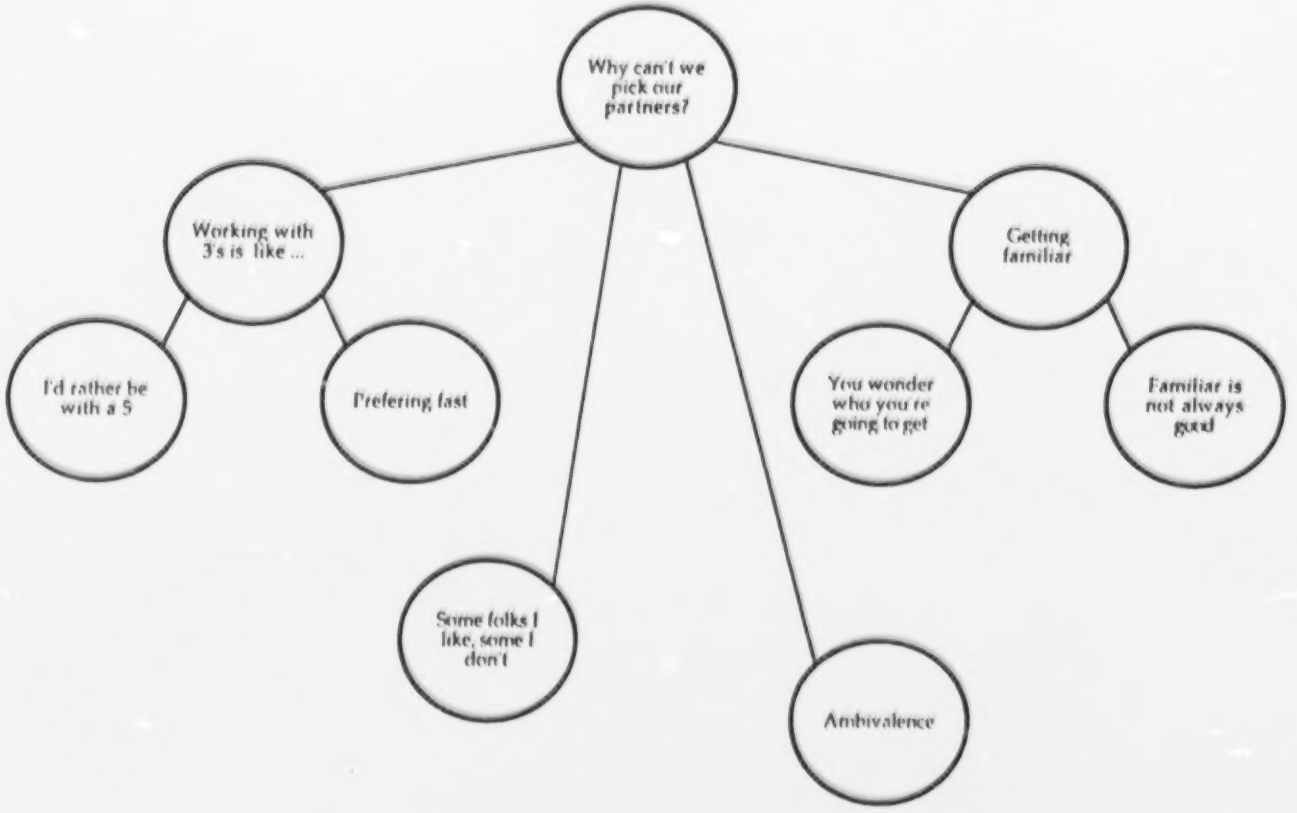
Why can't we pick our partners?
Working with 3's is like ...
I'd rather be with a 5
Prefering fast
Some folks I like, some I don't
Ambivalence
Getting familiar
You wonder who you're going to get
Familiar is not always good

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Figure 4
Metacategory D: We both know different things

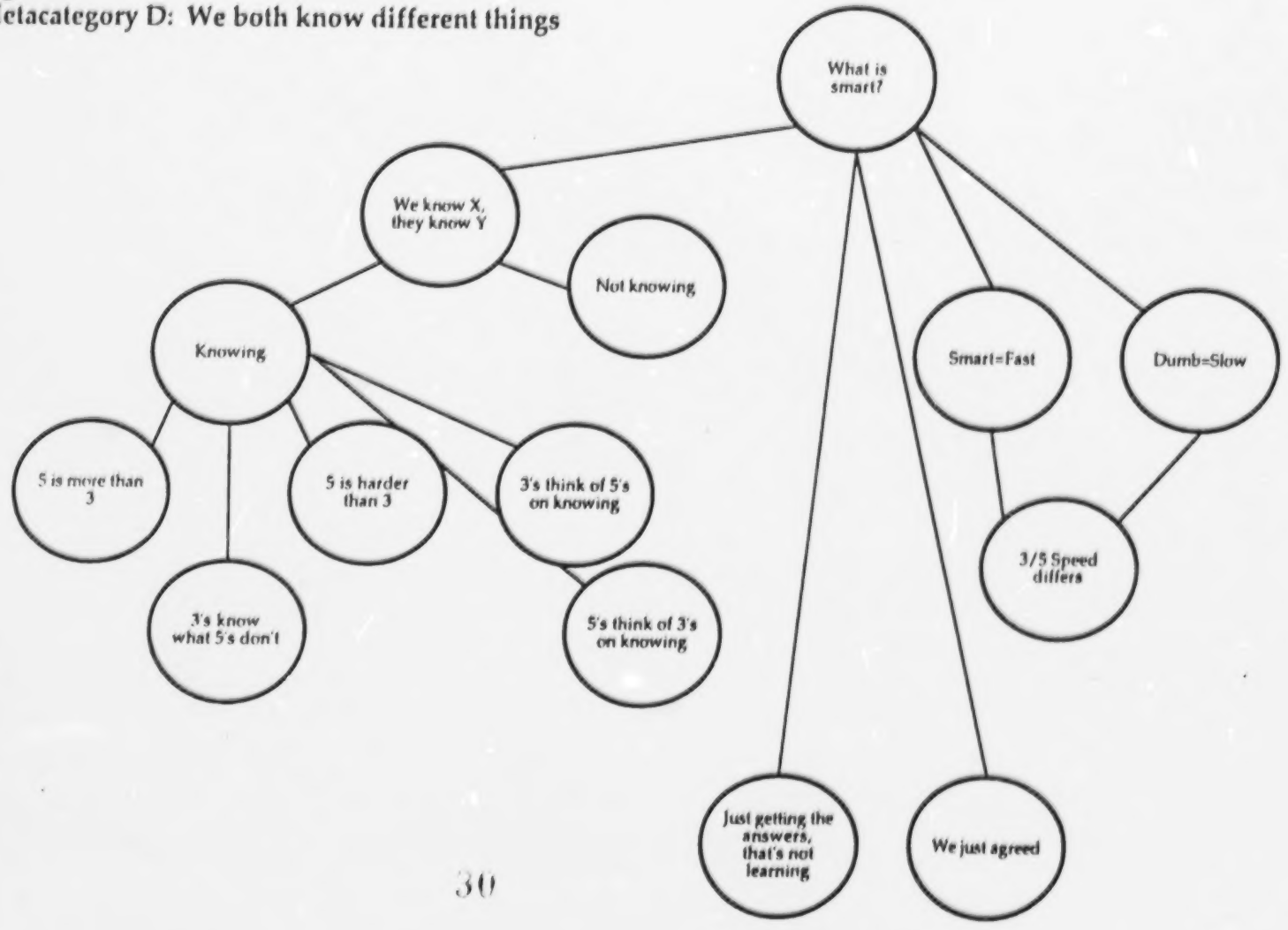

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Figure 5
Metacategory E: Because they help us a lot

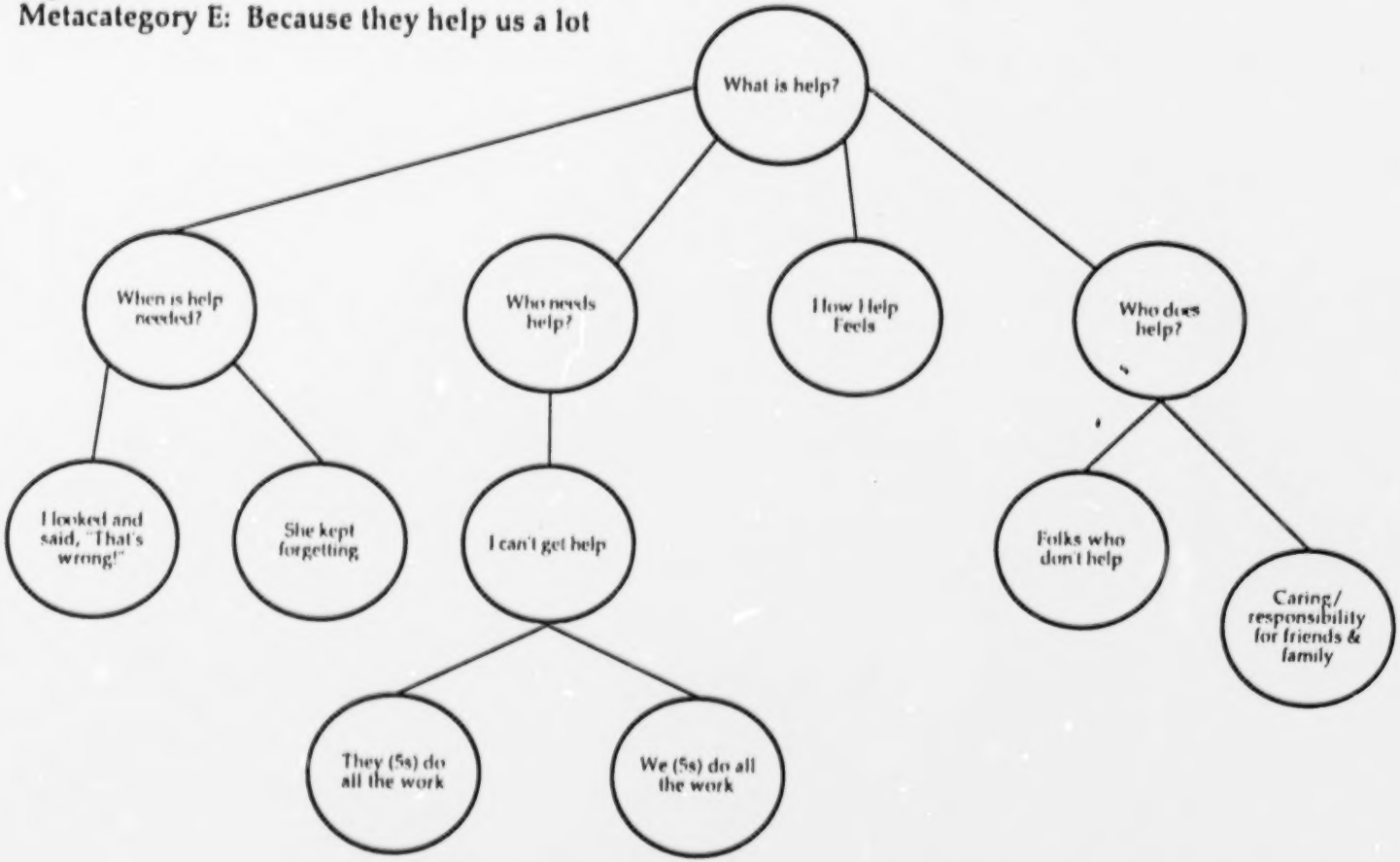
What is help?
When is help needed?
Who needs help?
How Help Feels
Who does help?
I looked and said, "That's wrong!"
She kept forgetting
I can't get help
Folks who don't help
Caring/ responsibility for friends & family
They (5s) do all the work
We (5s) do all the work

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Figure 6
Metacategory F: We work together

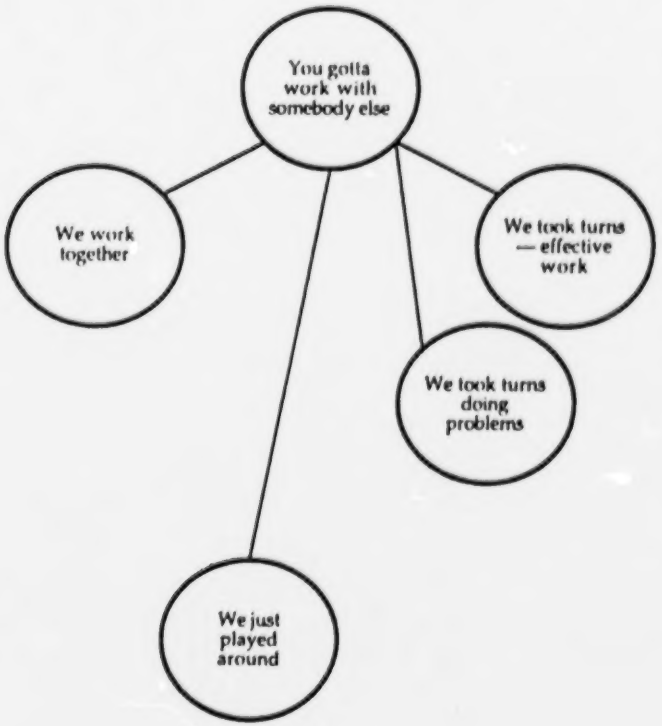
You gotta work with somebody else
We work together
We took turns — effective work
We took turns doing problems
We just played around

Figure 7
Metacategory G: I had a lot of fun

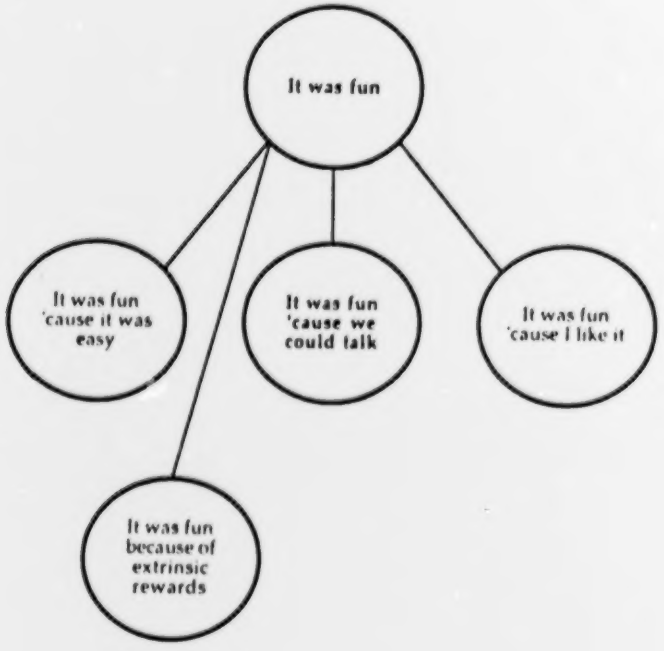
It was fun
It was fun 'cause it was easy
It was fun 'cause we could talk
It was fun 'cause I like it
It was fun because of extrinsic rewards

Figure 8
Metacatagories

They like different things than us because they have to be themselves
Are we going to do something about feelings?
Why can't we pick our partners?
We both know different things
Because they help us a lot
I had a lot of fun
We work together

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